

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 8, 2008

The Honorable Kevin J. Martin
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20554

Dear Chairman Martin:

We write to you today to reiterate our strongly held belief that in the coming months, efforts to ensure our nation's preparedness for the digital television transition should be the primary focus of media policy at the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

We are now less than six months away from the digital television transition. We are concerned that between now and February 17, 2009, more work remains to be done to ensure that broadcasters are ready to make the switch and that consumers understand the steps they need to take to prepare for the transition to digital signals. To this end, we note that a recent report from the General Accountability Office (GAO) found that while a majority of broadcasters are prepared for the transition, some technical and coordination issues remain. In particular, some stations need to complete construction of their final digital facilities, and others need to relocate their digital channel to complete the transition. As part of this report, the GAO noted that some stations were waiting for decisions from the FCC, such as approval for a construction permit or for changes to their final digital channel.

We also are concerned that too many consumers are confused about what they need to do to manage the transition in their homes. According to a survey from Consumer Reports, misconceptions about what the transition will require of consumers are widespread. While Consumer Reports found that over one third of Americans living in television households are entirely unaware of the transition, it also found that over half incorrectly believe that every television set will need a digital converter box to function after February 17, 2009. Converter box coupon redemption rates appear to support this last finding. While the National Telecommunications and Information Administration has issued and mailed over twenty-four million converter box coupons, redemption rates hover at just under fifty percent. This suggests that the majority of coupon requesting households were either unable to secure converter boxes within the statutory 90-day time frame or were confused about the steps they need to take to prepare their homes for the transition.

We find these facts troubling. In order to ensure both broadcaster and consumer readiness, we suggest that in the months ahead you focus the FCC Media Bureau's resources on managing the switch from analog to digital signals. Pursuing contentious policy initiatives, such as the unbundling of wholesale subscription television channels, would divert the attention of the Bureau at this critical time. The Committee will continue its efforts to alert people to the digital

television transition and we encourage the FCC to make every effort to ensure broadcasters and consumers are adequately prepared so that no one is left without service on February 18, 2009.

Sincerely,

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DANIEL K. INOUE

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Kay Bailey Hutchison', written over a horizontal line.

KAY BAILEY HUTCHISON

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Ted Stevens', written over a horizontal line.

TED STEVENS